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SUBJECT: EMBASSY CONFERENCE PROMOTES RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AS  
CENTRAL ELEMENT OF U.S. POLICY

REFS: Vatican 4517; Vatican 4441

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SUMMARY  
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1. Post's final conference in a series marking the twentieth anniversary of diplomatic relations with the Holy See promoted religious freedom as a core goal of U.S. foreign policy. An ensemble of high-level Vatican and USG officials, along with academics and NGO experts, offered a comprehensive overview of the importance of religious freedom to democracy and civil society, the challenges to religious freedom, and an assessment of what can be done to address these challenges. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom John Hanford described U.S. efforts to combat and monitor freedom of religion, highlighting the role of the State Department's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom. The Holy See's Foreign Minister equivalent, Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, reviewed the Vatican's diplomatic activity on behalf of religious freedom, emphasizing the central importance of religious freedom to the life of the Catholic Church. All speakers agreed that religious liberty was essential for enhanced international cooperation and security, and agreed that much needed to be done in this area. Speakers agreed that governments, NGOs and religious authorities needed to work together to expand such freedom worldwide. The program generated extensive international and Italian media coverage. End Summary.

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U.S. LEADS GLOBAL DRIVE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
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2. Opening the Embassy-organized conference, "Religious Freedom: Cornerstone of Human Dignity," Ambassador Nicholson emphasized U.S. leadership in promoting and defending religious freedom throughout the world. Observing that the desire for religious liberty was the driving force for the establishment of the first American colonies, the Ambassador noted that it has been a central tenet of American life from our foundation. Religious liberty, he pointed out, was closely linked to world peace and stability, for where religious liberty was not respected, and where religious tolerance and respect for the rights of others were not common, conflict and violence often ensued. The Ambassador outlined U.S. initiatives to monitor and combat violations against religious freedom, including the work of U.S. embassies, the 1998 Religious Freedom Act, and the establishment of the State Department's Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. Nicholson highlighted the convergence of U.S. and Holy See objectives on religious freedom - which President Bush has described as a "fundamental freedom" and Pope John Paul II has termed the "basis of all other freedoms."

3. Pointing out that over half the world's population lives under governments that restrict religious freedom, U.S. Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom John Hanford outlined U.S. efforts to combat and monitor freedom. While citing progress in Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkmenistan, and India, Hanford detailed continuing problems in countries of particular concern including Saudi Arabia, Iran, North Korea, Burma, China, Vietnam, Eritrea and Sudan. Ambassador Hanford emphasized that religious freedom was a personal priority for President Bush, who frequently raises U.S. concerns directly with foreign leaders. Turning to Iraq where Chaldean Catholic Churches have come under attack, Hanford affirmed USG concern about new threats against Christians in Iraq and about the resulting Christian exodus from the country. Religious extremism, according to the Ambassador, represented a major threat to the international order, as extremists have come to believe that religion demands the death of innocents and the destruction of liberty. He said that the U.S. holds confidently to the idea that expanded respect for religious freedom will ultimately cultivate greater respect for human

dignity. Ambassador Hanford concluded with a strong message for those suffering religious persecution around the world: "We will not forget them, and we will never abandon their cause."

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HOLY SEE'S RAISON D'ETRE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
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4.Holy See FM Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, noting "the importance of religious freedom for the very life of the Church," observed that the Holy See has always placed priority on religious liberty as the most fundamental human right. To promote favorable conditions for believers everywhere, Vatican diplomacy has engaged both bilaterally and multilaterally. In its bilateral dealings, the Vatican has pursued "concordat diplomacy" to allow the Catholic Church to operate freely within a particular country, while cooperating with national governments as a positive social agent. In this regard, Lajolo pointed out that bilateral agreements made by the Holy See with certain countries have often led to similar arrangements for other religious denominations. For example, the Holy See's 1984 Concordat with Italy, preceded a similar pact that same year between Italy and the Waldensian Church.

5.On the multilateral level, Lajolo said that the Holy See participates actively in UN Third Committee debates in New York and in Geneva at the UN Commission on Human Rights. He said the Holy See supports expanded cooperation between the UN and world religions, as proposed recently by the Philippines, as long as such cooperation does not interfere with inter-religious dialogue, which the Holy See considers to be the competence of religious authorities. Lajolo also recalled the Holy See's central role in ensuring the inclusion of religious freedom in the "decatalogue" of human rights that OSCE states committed themselves to uphold, and then of obtaining an expansive description of the content of religious freedom.

16. Assessing the challenges to religious freedom today, Lajolo observed that the war against terrorism, while necessary, has had as a side effect "the spread of 'Christianophobia' in vast areas of the globe" where Western civilization and western policies "are considered to be determined by Christianity, or at least not separated from it." In Western societies themselves, Lajolo cautioned against neglect of the "public dimension of religious freedom," which would encompass a healthy dialogue between church and state. In other areas of the world, Lajolo lamented restrictions the right of religions to organize freely and criticized regimes that created difficult conditions for the registration of religious communities or imposed penalties for religious conversion. On the margins of the Conference, Lajolo called attention to the Vatican's recent efforts to place anti-Christianity on the UN and OSCE human rights agenda - a point that Embassy and the Holy See have recently discussed in depth (reftels).

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Religious Freedom as Foundation for International Order  
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7.Seamus Hasson, Founder and President of the Beckett Fund for Religious Liberty, offered Conference delegates a compelling argument of how in the American tradition religious liberty has been regarded as a "human right that no government grants in the first place and therefore no government may properly deny." Religious freedom, says Hasson, follows from human nature itself. Hasson recalled James Madison's views on religious liberty in which everyone had the freedom to embrace, profess and observe the religion "which we believe to be of divine origin." Madison's hesitancy over enshrining religious freedom in law revealed his fear that the inalienable nature of the right would somehow be compromised. Hasson noted that Madison consistently maintained that the national right of

religious freedom was broader than that enshrined in the Constitution. He went on to attribute much of the confusion over religious liberty in present-day America to the confusion between natural rights and legal rights. When presented examples of abuses of religious freedom based on legal systems, Hasson suggested most Americans would "continue to follow in the trajectory of our founding: religious liberty is a human right that no government grants in the first place and therefore no government may properly deny."

8.Notre Dame University Law School Professor Paolo Carozza, argued that religious freedom was not merely a requirement of respecting individual human dignity, but

also a requirement for peace, security and cooperation among nations. It would be a grave mistake, said Carozza, for international politics and law to exclude or ignore religion, because, for huge segments of the human race, religious communities and religious traditions are the primary context for "wrestling with the meaning of reality." While this religious dimension could not be ignored, Carozza cautioned that not all expressions of religion manifest openness to a universal common good; and that this poses a significant challenge for international law and politics. In this regard, Carozza called for a "very robust understanding of religious freedom" in order to avoid naivety about its potential dangers.

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NGOs: KEEPERS OF THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FLAME  
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9.The Institute on Religion and Public Policy's Joseph Grieboski delivered an impassioned apology for the role of NGOs to promote and defend religious freedom, which he described as foundational: "Without freedom of religion and belief, there is no freedom of speech, as believers cannot communicate publicly their most fundamental beliefs; there is no freedom of the press, as believers cannot print and share their beliefs with others; and there is no freedom of assembly, as like-minded believers cannot meet to share their beliefs and worship their Creator according to the dictates of their minds, hearts, and consciences." Grieboski pointed out that NGOs in the religious freedom advocacy field play an important role in gathering information, disseminating information to policymakers, religious leaders, other NGOs, and the general public, and shaping policy to advance the cause of religious freedom. Grieboski argued convincingly that a government's guarantee of freedom of religion indicates acceptance of the premise of democracy: that every individual has value and worth, and that the state is constituted to serve society, not vice versa. In this sense, he concluded, freedom of religion serves as the cornerstone of democracy.

10.Attilio Tamburrini, Director of the Italian section of Aid to the Church in Need, outlined his NGO's work in assisting persecuted Christians and reporting instances of religious freedom violations around the world. Tamburrini's organization has official status at the Holy See and works out of Vatican offices. Since 1998, Aid to the Church in Need has published an annual report on religious freedom around the world. Tamburrini's presentation highlighted what he described as an urgent need to stimulate the public consciousness on religious freedom issues. Noting the media success of the launch of this year's edition of his organization's report, Tamburrini lamented the lack of media coverage of religious freedom issues throughout the rest of the year - which he attributed to a "cultural hostility towards religious issues." Nonetheless, he praised the work of Ambassador Hanford and the Embassy's initiative in organizing the conference, hoping that such initiatives would multiply, and in particular stimulating academic and governmental interest in religious freedom issues. He noted that the Italian government had held its first ever parliamentary hearings on the subject only within the past year.

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China, Holy Land, Nigeria: Regional Perspectives  
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11.To rounding off the Conference, panelists Bernardo Cervellero, David Maria Jaeger and Dan Madigan looked at three regions of religious freedom concern. Cervellero a China expert and a member of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, urged that the current wave of political and economic engagement with China be tempered by a recognition of the appalling religious freedom situation in the communist state. While there had been some cosmetic changes in regard to religious freedom, Cervellera pointed to a recent Party document outlining plans to "promote atheism and ban religions and superstitions." He said Chinese authorities saw religious freedom purely as a legislative concession by the State and not as a fundamental human right.

12. Franciscan Father David Maria Jaeger lauded USG support for on-going diplomatic negotiations between the Vatican and Israel aimed at regularizing the position of the Catholic Church in the Holy Lands. Jaeger is a member of the Vatican delegation negotiating with Israeli authorities on elements of the Fundamental Agreement established between the two States in 1994. The Franciscan priest formerly served as a senior member of the Vatican's Custody of the Holy Land, responsible for maintaining

Christian holy sites, and the care of pilgrims and resident Christians. He urged Middle Eastern states to recognize and adopt international standards of freedom of religion and conscience, "assuring their citizens, and all others, of complete civic equality." Jaeger noted the significance of Israel and the Palestinian Authority being the first in the region to sign agreements with the Vatican guaranteeing religious freedom, given the Vatican's interest in the plight of Christians in the Holy Land.

13. Jesuit Dan Madigan told the Conference that many conflicts that seem to have a religious root are, in fact, conflicts in which religious differences are manipulated to protect economic or political power. He cited Nigeria as a key example. Madigan said the global political situation is often played out on the local level, with some Christian communities suffering because of what some Muslims see as a global Christian and Western offensive against Islam. Madigan called for a comprehensive approach to human rights, saying that if religious freedom was foundational, then its defenders should also work to promote the other rights inherent to human dignity. (Note: Madigan runs the Gregorian University's Institute for Culture and Religion, and trains future Catholic leaders and students from other religious traditions in issues related to inter-religious dialogue and religious freedom. End note).

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Extensive Media Coverage  
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14. The Conference garnered extensive media coverage in international, Catholic, and Italian media. The Italian Catholic daily Avvenire devoted a full page to the conference under the headline "Religious Liberty is at Risk Everywhere." Other Italian media coverage included leading dailies Corriere della Sera and Il Tempo and the national news wire service ANSA, which issued three stories highlighting challenges to religious freedom. Coverage also included a pre-conference live interview with Ambassadors Nicholson and Hanford on Vatican Radio, which boasts an international audience of tens of thousands of listeners in 40 languages. The National Catholic Reporter's "Word from Rome, with a global Catholic audience," ran extensive excerpts of remarks made by Lajolo and Hanford. A pre-conference Q&A with Ambassador Nicholson in the international ZENIT News Service -- distributed in the English, Italian and Spanish versions -- previewed key aspects of the conference, while ZENIT's Italian version also ran an extensive pre-conference interview with Ambassador Hanford. Other news service coverage included REUTERS, Vatican Information Service

(VIS), Catholic News Service (CNS) and AsiaNews.

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Comment  
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15. The Embassy's conference on religious freedom drew a large audience -- over 250 -- and extensive media coverage, reflecting the growing interest in the subject of religious freedom as a "cornerstone" of human dignity and of a more secure international order. The Conference resonated strongly with the Holy See, whose Prime Minister equivalent, Cardinal Sodano, took a personal interest in ensuring high-level Vatican participation. Indeed, the participation of Foreign Minister Lajolo made clear the importance the Holy See attaches to this issue. By bringing together the USG's Ambassador for Religious Freedom with the Vatican's FM, the Conference served to highlight the commonality of U.S. and Holy See views and establish some directions for future action to expand the reach of religious freedom where it is under threat. Embassy greatly appreciates the participation of the U.S. Ambassador for Religious Freedom, who was able to convey effectively to a diverse international audience the depth of the U.S. commitment to greater religious freedom for all believers.

Nicholson

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